

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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STIFFER LAW URGED BY INTERIOR TO PROTECT ALLIGATOR, OTHER WILDLIFE

The Department of the Interior said today it has asked Congress to enact stronger legislation to protect the alligator and other endangered wildlife of the United States as well as to control imports of such species, thus adding to their worldwide protection.

Penalties for violating the law would be a maximum \$5,000 fine for civil offenses and a \$10,000 fine, or one year imprisonment, or both, for criminal offenses.

The Department said that "legislation to afford better protection of the alligator in the United States and foreign endangered species should be enacted by the Congress as soon as possible."

In proposing stronger legislation, the Department pointed out that Secretary Walter J. Hickel has urged "stiffer penalties" for interstate trafficking in hides from illegally taken alligators.

The Department's proposal, in the form of amendments to legislation now before Congress, was submitted by Under Secretary Russell E. Train.

The Department also requested that the amount to be spent in acquiring land for safeguarding endangered fish and wildlife under the 1966 Endangered Species Act be increased from \$750,000 to \$2.5 million.

The Under Secretary pointed out that this increase would enable the Department to complete the Mason Neck (Virginia) Wildlife Refuge, which is a valuable nesting area for the endangered southern bald eagle, and to complete purchase of additional land at the Patuxent (Maryland) Wildlife Research Center for the propagation of endangered wildlife.

It also would increase from \$750,000 to \$1 million the amount, now specified in pending legislation (H. R. 4812), that could be invested annually for acquiring inholdings (private tracts) in areas administered by the Department for wildlife, park, recreation, and other values. Typical is Everglades National Park, Florida, where such inholdings have significant values for endangered species of fish or wildlife, Train said.

In a letter of transmittal to Congress, Train pointed out that acquisition of inholdings in Everglades National Park alone would exceed \$750,000. Everglades is the scene of intensified law-enforcement activities ordered by Secretary Hickel to curb alligator poaching.

The Department's proposals also:

...Encourage an international meeting for developing ways to protect endangered fish and wildlife.

...Broaden the definition of "fish and wildlife" to include reptiles, mollusks, and crustaceans.

...Permit the Secretary of the Interior to grant special one-year exemptions, in certain cases only, for importing wildlife or wildlife remains when abrupt termination of such imports would result in hardship.

The Department has been informed that hearings on a companion endangered species bill are scheduled for May 14 and 15 before the Senate Commerce Committee.

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